

The History of the North Bay YMCA

by
Edwin Clarke
0511364

Independent Research Project
Prof. Francoise Noel
August 25th, 2008

When you first walk into the North Bay YMCA, you find a modern facility with a wide range of activities and services available. You also find a staff that is friendly, courteous, helpful and above all, welcoming – as was recognized with an award ranking them first in the country in 2004. The North Bay Y offers an impressive array of aquatic programs, fitness activities, and services for its members and the entire community. It also provides financial assistance to those who wish to join, but cannot afford the cost of membership. In addition, the branch is consistently involved with local events and fund-raising. The YMCA has come a long way in North Bay from when it was first organized in 1958, and its growth can be attributed directly to the citizens of the city who made the effort to ensure its continued success. Without the hard work of countless supporters, the YMCA likely would not have survived to today. The 1960s in particular were a trying time financially, and the North Bay YMCA only emerged from the period because of the determination of its staff and volunteers and the support of the local community.

To fully understand the background to the history of the North Bay YMCA, it is necessary to go back to the roots of the organization and examine how it evolved over the years. The first Young Men's Christian Association was founded by George Williams in London, England in 1844 and aimed to create a positive alternative for young men to popular recreational destinations like taverns and brothels. Williams, who had been drawn into London to work during the Industrial Revolution and found a lack of healthy activities in the city, sought to create an organization that would offer positive leisure opportunities to other young men.¹ It would not be long before the YMCA crossed the

¹ Clifford W. Putney, "Going Upscale: The YMCA and Postwar America, 1950-1990," *Journal of Sport History* 20, no. 2 (1993): 151.

pond and appeared in both the United States and Canada. Similar to Williams' vision, North American YMCAs were funded and built with the aim of influencing those who were seen as susceptible to the sinful attraction of saloons and brothels. Specifically, men and women on their own in the late nineteenth century city were becoming a pressing social problem. These people were often bereft of family and friends once in the city, and the Y aimed to address their immediate needs. These young men and women were thus able to find temporary housing, referrals to job openings and vocational classes at the Y.²

The first Canadian YMCA was in Montreal and opened in 1851, just 7 years after Williams started the organization. Canadian Ys played a prominent role in creating and expanding adult education courses. These efforts helped initiate Concordia University in Montreal, Carleton University in Ottawa and York University in Toronto.³ Nineteenth century YMCAs in North America had a prominent religious component as well. They started in part as a nondenominational effort under Protestant leadership to win back men to the churches. Bible study and religious observance were thus heavily encouraged. This religious goal gradually became more understated and by the early twentieth century, it had evolved to reflect progressive and more secular themes. Rather than specifically encouraging religious observance, the Y aimed to fit citizens into urban life and expanded upon the important services it offered to men and women alone in the city. In addition, physical education had become a major component of Y programs by the First World War.⁴

² Ruth Crocker, review of *Men and Women Adrift: The YMCA and the YWCA in the City*, by Nina Mjagkij and Margaret Spratt, eds., *Journal of American History* 85, no. 2 (1998): 697.

³ Jennifer Hamilton-McCharles, "New Stamp Honours YMCA," *North Bay Nugget*, November 10th, 2001.

⁴ Crocker, review of *Men and Women Adrift*, 698.

As the YMCA shed its religious agenda, its membership and services became more diverse. By 1951, nearly two fifths of American Y members were non-Protestant.⁵ At the same time, the Y was becoming a much more family-oriented organization. Whereas female membership in 1934 was only 5.9%, by 1950 it had grown to 13.5% and 21.9% by 1959. These figures reflected the tremendous growth of “family serving YMCAs”, which had grown from only 17 branches in 1931 to 338 in 1956.⁶ This shift was a direct result of the development of suburban areas in the postwar period, as the Y aimed to serve the entire family and community, rather than just males. As this shift took place, traditional Y services geared towards young men became less prominent. Broader family interests took precedence and Y services expanded to address them. An emphasis on the importance of child services in particular grew and is a significant part of Y social work today. The beginnings of this broadening of Y membership goes back to 1910, when the YMCA made the following statement: “We go on record as urging all Associations to take definite steps toward the goal of making full participation in the Association program without discrimination to race, color, or nationality.”⁷ The Y has since earned a reputation as a community organization open to all, a characteristic which is definitely evident in North Bay.

The Beginnings of the North Bay YMCA

The North Bay YMCA first began to take shape in 1958 when it became apparent to a number of concerned citizens that there was a growing need for organized, constructive recreation for the youth of the community. Local businessmen and community leaders grouped together and organized a professional committee to assess

⁵ Putney, “Going Upscale,” 153.

⁶ Ibid, 152.

⁷ Ibid, 157.

local needs as well as potential means of fulfilling them. The committee, with assistance and guidance from the Sudbury YMCA and the Toronto-based YMCA National Council, conducted a survey of North Bay's recreational facilities. They also examined eight other Ontario towns of a similar size and population to North Bay with YMCAs, in order to better understand the ability of the local population to support a Y. The towns ranged in size from Midland – with only 8,200 people at the time – to Niagara Falls, with a population of 23,600. North Bay's population by 1961 was 33,545, more than any of the eight towns under consideration.⁸ Each YMCA was fairly well supported as well, as each had a membership base of at least 450 people. Although five of the eight towns had only limited or rented facilities, three enjoyed standard facilities, two of which featured pools.

These findings supported the notion that North Bay could reasonably be expected to support its own YMCA, and perhaps even its own pool. It seems that the possibility of a pool may have created some of the local interest in a YMCA. Part of the committee's surveying efforts included popular opinion. Two main questions were asked – “What is the greatest sport need in your community?” and “What is the greatest social need in your community?” The leading answers to the questions were, respectively, “swimming facilities” with 24%, and “YMCA” with 30%.⁹ In addition, the survey indicated that swimming instruction was seen as the most important contribution that could be made to the city's youth, given the city's location on Lake Nipissing.

Drawing on these facts, the committee called a meeting and outlined their reasons for organizing a local Y:

⁸ Canadian Census, 1961.

⁹ “YMCA Supporters Call Important Meet,” *North Bay Nugget*, January 7th, 1959.

While a number of youth activities are available to the children of North Bay and district, it is evident that a half, or more, of them do not participate to any extent in organized programs. It is evident, also, that there are many gaps in youth programs which could be filled, to provide teen-agers with incentive and opportunity for living in a Christian democratic setting ... youth can learn to accept responsibility in the practice of democratic living. This, today, is so obviously essential to our future that it should not be necessary to over-emphasize it.¹⁰

The committee also extolled the reasons the YMCA could operate from an exceptional position: "We believe that the YMCA can offer a unique service because it is a private organization which has no legal ties with any church, social agency or government, yet co-operates with all these, works with people of all ages, allows no barriers of race, color or creed."¹¹ Moreover, local branches of the YMCA enjoy a special role and freedom, as they enjoy aid from the National Council upon request, but operate entirely independently and self-autonomously.¹² A new YMCA in North Bay would therefore be able to provide traditional Y services, but would be run by individuals who are familiar with the specific needs of North Bay's citizens and strive to address them. Additionally, the committee pointed out that many recreation directors receive training at YMCAs, and that having a local branch to provide instruction would increase the chances of the city retaining its youth.

¹⁰ "Large Meeting Friday Night to Discuss YMCA for N. Bay," *North Bay Nugget*, January 15th, 1959.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Lorne Gannon, "North Bay YMCA Vital Part of International Movement," *North Bay Nugget*, March 5th, 1968.

The meeting of about one hundred citizens was receptive to the committee's findings, and unanimously agreed to proceed with the formation. At the meeting, visiting Y officials from Toronto and Sudbury were present to assist the committee and outline information regarding operations and procedures. Harold Wood, a Y official, suggested that the North Bay YMCA be a family branch, as was the one in Sudbury. As previously mentioned, these were becoming increasingly popular, and allowed the entire community to use Y services. The small committee group thus formally organized the North Bay YMCA in January 1959 and managed to raise an initial operating fund by using their own personal money and by soliciting additional financial support from local businesses. The committee formed the initial board of directors – John Farquhar, who was elected North Bay's first YMCA president, Wes McNutt, J.L. Shaw, Alderman Nell Mallory and G.A. Alger.¹³ Alger was director of the North Bay Chamber of Commerce and announced the chamber's plan to support the Y project as well. In the period following the Y's initial organization, the board of directors made a formal request to the National Council of the YMCA for a professional secretary, and in the meantime, the council posted Bob Smith and Hank Labatt to North Bay to help set up and initiate the first programs.

Although plans to form the North Bay Y were followed through on, there was still the matter of finding a proper facility to house the organization. The committee acknowledged that a permanent building was not immediately necessary, and temporary headquarters could be used for the time being. However, as originally made clear by the preliminary survey, there was a widespread belief in the need for an indoor pool. An editorial in the *North Bay Nugget* following the meeting supported this sentiment and

¹³ *North Bay Nugget*, January 17th, 1959.

suggested that a building fund be started immediately. The urgency of these calls stemmed from a concern that building might be delayed for a significant period, as had happened in Chatham. The Chatham Y was founded in 1945, but ground was not broken for a permanent facility until 1959. Regardless of the concerns that a similar situation would arise in North Bay, the local YMCA was still almost a decade away from a permanent facility.

The first YMCA headquarters were located in an old Ontario Northland Railroad building just off Main St., which was attained fairly inexpensively. A fire at this location forced the Y to move to 175 Main St. W. above what was for many years Lafrance Furs. This location was not used for long either, however, as it was thought to be a fire hazard. They then moved to a floor above another business, Kizell Men's Wear shop, and then to a Baptist church.¹⁴ At that time, the architectural firm Hill-Clark-Frances was preparing plans for the site of the old Ferguson home on McIntyre St. W. and did not need the home itself in the interval, giving the Y group a few months in its own building. The house was of particular historical importance, as it was the home of John Ferguson, the founder of North Bay. The firm thus offered the home to the city for \$1, with the stipulation that it had to be removed from the property after a few months, and granted use of the home to the YMCA in April while plans were finalized.¹⁵ Shortly thereafter, the Y was able to provide supervised recreation for teens aged fourteen to nineteen three nights a week, but this was short lived, as the architectural firm had asked that the Ferguson home be vacated by July 18th.

¹⁴ "Building Opening Culminates Years of Hard Work," *North Bay Nugget*, March 5th, 1968.

¹⁵ "Old Ferguson Homestead Offered to City for \$1," *North Bay Nugget*, April 14th, 1959.

The cost of running the operation and handling these frequent moves was high and in order to help meet its operating expenses, the Y organized a two week financial campaign in the summer, chaired by Herb Sparrow. President Farquhar also called for donations from the community of furniture and equipment for games.¹⁶ To provide further evidence to potential donors that the local population can reasonably be expected to support its own branch, Jack Gorman, the publicity chairman for the Y, announced in a speech to the Lions Club: "There are 5,000 young people between the ages of 10 and 24 in the district, to produce an excellent YMCA."¹⁷ Despite the efforts of the Y group and its supporters, fund-raising was not successful enough to provide the means to find permanent quarters. As a result, the group was forced to move from one temporary location to another in the following few years.

The Y group was plagued by a precarious financial position, but endured by offering youth and adult programs carried on in rented and borrowed church and school facilities. By the early 1960s, numerous activities were being offered and a day camp was run during the summer. Swim classes were being held at the Pinewood Park motel swimming pool, and boys' and girls' baseball teams played thanks to the sponsorship of various businesses. Agreements with local school boards allowed the Y to use the facilities at Algonquin Composite School and Sunset Park Public School to host basketball, gymnastics and fitness classes. Weightlifting equipment was purchased in 1963, and a weight training department was set up under Earl Reckzine.¹⁸ An archery

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ "Widdifield Lions Told About Reasons for Supporting Campaign for YMCA Here," *North Bay Nugget*, June 9th, 1959.

¹⁸ Carl Chadbourne, "YMCA Activities," *North Bay Nugget*, June 15th, 1963.

club used Pinewood Park for its practices. The Y additionally provided a social centre, a boys club and a junior chorus.

As it has continued to do throughout its time in North Bay, the YMCA provided many camp and child care services in the early years. Camp Bay Y was first started in 1962 at Four Mile Bay as a day camp for eight to twelve year olds and the following year, it was available for four weeks at a cost of \$7 per child per week. The camp provided a full program of swimming, crafts, hiking, sports, canoeing and various outdoor activities and was well attended each summer. A babysitting service was also made available during women's activities, at a cost of 50 cents per family per hour. Moreover, membership costs were kept significantly low, ensuring a significant membership base. In 1963, yearly membership at the Y cost \$3 per adult and \$2 per student and was open to everyone over fifteen.¹⁹ Despite its financial and physical obstacles, the Y was able to carry on and offer services and activities which would continue to evolve and expand.

1963 Campaign for Permanent Building

Although the YMCA was managing under difficult circumstances, its board of directors continued to aspire for a permanent home. By 1963 however, the financial situation had become so uncertain that serious thought was given to abandoning the project altogether. Through the determination of some members, it was decided to make a last ditch effort to put the Y on a more stable foundation. Rising to meet the challenge, a campaign for funds was announced in the summer and ran from November through December. Dick Tafel, the 3rd Y president after Farquhar and Helen Howard announced

¹⁹ Ibid.

the campaign in August and their intentions of providing a greater range of activities by purchasing a church on Dudley St.: “With the purchase of the Omond Memorial Church we hope to build the YMCA into the type of community organization that will play a vital part in the development of our youth.”²⁰ The campaign’s modest target was \$35,000 for the purchase of the church property and adjacent lots, as well as three years’ operating expenses and the employment of an experienced executive secretary. Tafel also reiterated the potential of the Y once it had its own building: “The Y is moving to and for the people. With the support of these same people, and with their interest and enthusiasm, an expanded invigorating program will emerge to benefit young and old alike, with the end result of a stronger YMCA and a stronger community.”²¹ It was hoped that in addition to the regular physical activities and games clubs (such as bridge and chess), the new building would provide facilities for judo, wrestling, weightlifting, gymnastics and a nursery school. The National Council again assisted the North Bay endeavor by sending Bob Smith from its Toronto offices to assist with the campaign.

In October, Wes McNutt accepted the position of general chairman for the campaign and formed a general committee and support committee of 30 leading citizens, which included Nipissing MP Jack Garland.²² At a meeting on October 24th, McNutt explained the need for a building, as the Y had been forced to move eight times by that point. Wilbur Howard, a guest speaker from a Toronto United Church, extolled the virtues of the YMCA. Howard spoke of the Y’s ability give its youth inspired leadership and to teach proper care for one’s body, mind and spirit – the symbolic meaning of the

²⁰ “Proposed YMCA Building here to be One of Finest in Ontario,” *North Bay Nugget*, August 9th, 1963.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² “Accepts Chairmanship of N. Bay YMCA Building Campaign,” *North Bay Nugget*, October 1st, 1963.

red triangle in the YMCA logo.²³ In a speech to the North Bay Rotary Club less than a week later, McNutt broke down the reasons for the campaign's target. The cost of the church building, land and intended renovations was to be \$20,460, while ensuing operating expenses were estimated to push the total to \$38,200. The Y had just \$3,200 of assets at the time, and thus needed \$35,000 to reach its target. The public was very receptive to the campaign and the variety of donors reflected this. When the campaign was almost halfway through, Tafel spoke of this range of Y supporters. One 70-year-old resident had given \$200, saying he wanted a stake in the future of North Bay's young people, while a group of teens earned \$15 from odd jobs and donated that, perhaps aware they could soon be using the Y's new facilities.²⁴ Thanks to the donations of the board of directors, local businesses, and the community at large, the campaign was a huge success, being oversubscribed by more than \$13,000, although in the end only \$41,762.39 was honoured. Still, the campaign netted almost \$7,000 more than its goal, a good reflection of the widespread support the Y enjoyed.²⁵

Thanks to the successful campaign, the purchase of the church on Dudley St. was completed and plans were laid for renovations. The group also found money to hire a permanent general secretary. Keith Smith had been the North Bay Y's first secretary in 1958, and a succession of local young men served the position after his departure. Carl Chadbourne served the role of secretary until the end of the 1963 campaign, and also worked as an instructor and gym supervisor, but as Tafel remembers, "We were persuaded that we needed somebody more knowledgeable of the nuances of how a Y

²³ "YMCA Enthusiasts Hear Inspiring Message," *North Bay Nugget*, October 24th, 1963.

²⁴ "YMCA Fund Campaign Nears Halfway Mark," *North Bay Nugget*, November 15th, 1963.

²⁵ "YMCA President Outlines how Previous Campaign Funds Used," *North Bay Nugget*, August 23rd, 1966.

operated.”²⁶ This was particularly pressing, given the opportunity afforded by the newly purchased property. A more experienced and professional secretary was needed, and Ralph Erskine, who was the Sudbury YMCA’s physical director, was hired for the full time position in North Bay.

Unfortunately, the Dudley St. property was not to be used by the YMCA for very long. After its purchase in late 1963, plans for renovations went ahead in the following months. In July 1964, residence camping was being tried for the first time at Camp Tillicum. On July 4th, while the Y group was preparing to pack up their camping gear, a fan belt snapped in the forced-air heating unit, causing a fire which resulted in \$15,000 worth of damage.²⁷ This was obviously devastating given how far the Y had come in just the preceding year. A highly successful financial drive had allowed the purchase of new quarters and the hiring of a full time secretary. Programs and membership had expanded greatly as a result, but the fire cast the Y’s future in doubt once again. The Y group decided to call a special meeting to determine whether they should rebuild or relocate. The fire turned out to be a bit of a mixed blessing, in that it destroyed the Y’s home, but also opened the door for a new beginning that allowed the long sought after pool idea to come to fruition.

The Centennial Pool

Just five days after the fire on Dudley St, an impressive donation was made towards the construction of an indoor swimming pool. Lord Roy Thomson of Fleet, who fondly remembered North Bay as the place where he began his first radio station on the

²⁶ Dick Tafel, interview by author, June 18th, 2008.

²⁷ “Meeting the Challenge,” *YMCA 35th Anniversary Newsletter*, September 16th, 1993.

way to a dramatic business career that would make him a newspaper and media kingpin, donated \$100,000. This donation should not be discussed without mention of John Kennedy, a local businessman who was a significant city builder. Not only was he the major factor in obtaining Lord Thomson's gift, he also served as a director for the ONR, helped develop the subdivisions of Pinewood and Kenwood, and bought and moved the famous Dionne Quintuplet home to its current, publicly accessible site.²⁸ He also played prominent roles in establishing Nipissing University and North Bay's first television station.²⁹ Kennedy pointed to the lack of an indoor pool in the city in persuading Thomson to make such a significant donation. Final arrangements in accepting the offer were made the evening preceding the official announcement at a special meeting of the North Bay city council – the same night that the YMCA directors had scheduled their meeting. This was obviously more than a simple coincidence. Y president Tafel and other members of the board mysteriously appeared and were welcome participants at the meeting. The North Bay YMCA had an obvious and vital interest in the construction of a year-round swimming pool.

Upon learning of Thomson's donation, the YMCA set out to persuade city council to make the construction of the pool North Bay's Centennial project. This was of some significance, as the federal government would provide funding to Centennial projects, and would even match contributions made by communities. Convincing city council would not be an easy process, as there was a high degree of enthusiasm in North Bay for the Centennial, but the pool was in competition with a number of other projects. It would

²⁸ Dick Tafel, "John Kennedy One of the City's Prime Builders," *North Bay Nugget*, November 25th, 2003.

²⁹ Arnie Hakala, "John Kennedy – a Businessman with Vision," *North Bay Nugget*, November 15th, 2003.

take extensive negotiations, but the relationship that developed between the Y and council would continue to operate in subsequent years, allowing the Y to continue to grow and develop. Ultimately, the city council realized that the cost of running a pool is consequential, and the Y stepped in and offered to operate the pool, with the incentive that it would not cost the city anything. Dick Tafel remembers the process and obstacles they faced in reaching an agreement:

Well, that sounded like a good idea, but it was a bit “pie-in-the-sky” to some people, who knew that we weren’t much of an organization locally at that time. We were just a small group that said we would do it, but whether we could do it was another thing. So it took a lot of negotiation over a lot of time with one particular alderman [Richard Donnelly], who was very anxious that we get a binding agreement. It took about two years of discussion, and there was one time when it almost didn’t get done, because we thought we had an agreement, and he, the alderman Donnelly, he was very opposed to what the city lawyer had reached with us. He didn’t think it was strong enough. So we had to start all over again with him. It almost fell apart. If John Kennedy hadn’t stepped in ... he persuaded George Wallace to try to intervene and arbitrate between Donnelly and me to finalize this agreement with the city.³⁰

There were a few recurrent issues that city council wanted to resolve in particular. One of the main issues was the Y’s tax status. The Y, given its still unstable financial state and the fact that it was going to assume costs of running the pool, wanted to operate tax free. City council ultimately agreed that the Y could operate tax free for the time being, but that if future councils deemed it necessary, the Y’s status could again come under review.

³⁰ Dick Tafel, interview by author, June 18th, 2008.

Another issue was the use of the parking lot adjacent to Memorial Gardens, and the concern that it would not prove large enough to accommodate both the arena and the new pool. Memorial Gardens was eventually accepted as the prime user of the lot, but the Y was granted reasonable access as well. Finally, it was decided that something in the city ought to be named in honour of Lord Thomson and his tremendous contribution. As a result, the park behind Memorial Gardens and the pool was renamed Thomson Park.³¹ These issues took a long while to sort out, and it was not until April 1966 – almost a full two years after Thomson made his donation – that an official agreement was reached. The pact specified that the Y would assume responsibility of the pool's day-to-day operation and supervision, while the city agreed to undertake the costs of building maintenance. In order to ensure that the pool's operation continued to run smoothly, a commission was set up to supervise pool care and to act as a liaison between the Y and city council.³²

Once Lord Thomson's donation had been made and the Y group could reasonably anticipate to be assigned to operate the pool, the YMCA moved into a building on Jet Ave. at 11th St. The new temporary lodgings contained an office, an all-purpose room and a basement suitable for weight-lifting. Although the new building was not as large as the Dudley St. property, the Y group managed by once again resuming programs in churches and schools across the city. What remained of the Dudley St. church was sold to a French recreational program.³³ There still remained an important question however – where would the Y operate once the Centennial pool was complete? The best case scenario would obviously be a building on the same site that could integrate the new pool, but was

³¹ "We Shouldn't Let Park Project Bog Down," *North Bay Nugget*, November 16th, 1966.

³² Ralph Erskine, "Family YMCA," *North Bay Nugget*, March 4th, 1977.

³³ Dick Tafel, interview by author, June 18th, 2008.

that realistic or even possible? The board of directors decided to pursue this possibility, and once again asked the YMCA National Council to conduct a survey of the area and the feasibility of such a project. Although the North Bay group received encouragement and assistance from the National Council in 1959 and 1963, this time there would be disappointment. The final recommendation was that such an ambitious project not be undertaken because the population was not great enough to support it and was unlikely to be able to do so in the future. The North Bay Y should therefore continue to operate as before.

Discouraged and somewhat mystified by the results, the board held an emergency meeting at the Golden Dragon to make the final decision – to give up or take up the challenge. President Tafel made a strong plea to forge ahead and meet the challenge. They had already overcome fires, multiple moves and near financial ruin for almost a decade at this point. The new campaign would prove once and for all if local support for the Y was strong enough to ensure the longevity of a newly built facility. The board was receptive to Tafel's urging, and a campaign ten times the scale of the one in 1963 was soon organized.

Meeting the Challenge: Campaign for a "Home of our Own"

The new building campaign was organized during the first half of 1966 under the Y's newly elected president, Stewart Graham. The goal was set at \$352,000 – ten times the goal in 1963. The mammoth target was designed to provide funds for building and equipping a new complex that would adjoin the new Centennial pool. The fund would

also provide for a three year operating budget. For this exclusive purpose, the YMCA was given one acre of land for a nominal rent of \$1 per year at Thomson Park adjacent to the pool site. The low rate was a result of the Y's co-operation with city council for the Centennial pool project.³⁴ As in 1963, Wes McNutt would serve as general chairman for the campaign, while Robert Moynan would lead the public relations committee. This committee would publicize both the Y's plans and the campaign's progress.³⁵ Going into the campaign, the Y had just \$20,000 left in funds. This amount was remaining from the sale of the Dudley church and fire insurance. The difficult circumstances meant that the Y had to survive the three year period after the 1963 campaign on just \$23,977.28.³⁶

Although the National Council was not in favour of the highly ambitious campaign, the North Bay group received inspiration from a visit to Owen Sound and Sault Ste. Marie. An 11 person group from North Bay took a trip to visit both towns prior to the start of the campaign. Both towns had recently had successful campaigns to build Y complexes, and thus presented relevant examples for comparison. The Owen Sound campaign netted an impressive \$687,000, even more astounding given the town's population of just 17,000. The Sault Ste. Marie campaign on the other hand reached \$1.25 million. Bill Hawkins, general chairman of the Owen Sound campaign, had this message for the North Bay group:

Other cities of comparable size have gone after far more money per capita and gotten it. It all boils down to a problem of getting people to think big enough. To do this you need the right kind of men spearheading the drive for funds. There can

³⁴ Ralph Erskine, "Family YMCA," *North Bay Nugget*, March 4th, 1977.

³⁵ "Public Relations Chairman Named for YMCA Drive," *North Bay Nugget*, August 9th, 1966.

³⁶ "YMCA President Outlines how Previous Campaign Funds Used," *North Bay Nugget*, August 23rd, 1966.

be no half measures. Once you get the ball rolling and you have the enthusiasm built up, there will come a critical point at which you must appeal to the competitive spirit of your workers to go out and work hard for you. People must feel they are an integral part of this campaign. You must let them know you want them to take part. Only in this way can you generate the kind of enthusiasm you will need to put your campaign over the top.³⁷

This trip served to assure the group from North Bay that their target may not have been so unrealistic after all. One of the North Bay representatives described the effects of the trip as having: “done a world of good in making me realize what can and should be done. I’d say my enthusiasm for the coming campaign has just about tripled. I hope this enthusiasm rubs off on the people of North Bay.”³⁸

Plans for the front portion of the proposed new complex included small meeting rooms, a larger all purpose room, a special exercise room, a handball-squash court, a drop in lounge, kitchen and office. Behind this, plans called for a large gymnasium, which would play host to volleyball, basketball, badminton, floor hockey, fitness classes, gymnastics, judo, fencing and wrestling. The gym would also have a wider community value, as it would be made available for events such as meetings, banquets, and dances.³⁹

In order to meet the lofty campaign goal, the Y looked to community residents as well as local businesses and national firms. The pool itself was built from a fund of the original \$100,000 donated by Lord Thomson, which was further augmented by around \$50,000 in Centennial grants from the federal and provincial governments and city funds.

³⁷ “Flying Trip by N. Bay YMCA Group Gains Knowledge for Campaign Here,” *North Bay Nugget*, August 12th, 1966.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ “Sketch Shows How ‘Y’ Complex and Pool Will Look,” *North Bay Nugget*, August 17th, 1966.

By September 1966, construction on the pool was underway. Later that month, the YMCA campaign officially kicked off. Before the general canvass had even started, donations from the business and professional community had already pushed the Y fund to \$115,500.⁴⁰ Most of these donations were in the form of four year pledges. In addition, national firms and potentially substantial donors had been contacted by committees under Y president Wallace. On September 20th, the Y held a dinner for 375 volunteer campaign workers as an official start to the general campaign. The canvass was not to be held as a door-to-door venture. Rather, each canvasser was expected to call at least six people from a board listing 5000 people who were prospective donors. The general canvass was led by Charles Olmsted.⁴¹

To ensure that the volunteer canvassers remained motivated, as the Owen Sound and Sault Ste. Marie officials had identified as vital to the campaign's success, various incentives were organized for those who were particularly adept at securing donations. North Bay Lakewood Ford Sales provided a new sports car, to be given to the highest individual producer. The car was given to Rita Moynan at the first campaign meeting, and changed hands at each subsequent meeting.⁴² In addition, a picture of a masked man identified as a "friend of the Y" appeared in the *North Bay Nugget*, claiming that he would give \$100 extra to campaign teams with perfect attendance at meetings and another \$100 if every team member had made a personal pledge.⁴³ At the following meeting on October 4th, M.S. Macpherson was revealed as the "mystery man" and dished

⁴⁰ "Still in Preliminary Stage, YMCA Fund Passes \$70,000," *North Bay Nugget*, September 12th, 1966.

⁴¹ "300 Launch 'Y' Campaign," *North Bay Nugget*, September 21st, 1966.

⁴² "Canvass Teams Show Spirit, 'Y' Fund Zooms to \$143,046," *North Bay Nugget*, September 30th, 1966.

⁴³ "'Mystery Man' Reveals Special Awards for 'Y' Campaign Teams in City," *North Bay Nugget*, October 1st, 1966.

out \$1400 to the seven teams that met his challenge. Macpherson would continue to provide this incentive throughout the campaign. By this point, the campaign had garnered \$211,999 – already enough to surpass any previous fundraising effort in the area.⁴⁴

North Bay and its citizens were very receptive to the campaign. After it was announced, the city's religious leaders threw their support behind the Y effort. The Bishop Alexander Carter, Rabbi M. Frankel and Trinity United Church's Rev. W.C. Kitto all released statements giving their full unqualified support to the campaign.⁴⁵ As in 1963, a wide range of citizens of varying financial means made contributions to the Y drive. One former resident had a message to go along with his donation. Judge John H. McDonald, living in Sault Ste. Marie, included a newspaper clipping from the August 19th, 1947 edition of the *Nugget* with a letter and cheque to the Y. The article had the headline "YMCA is needed in North Bay Judge McDonald Tells Kiwanis." McDonald had returned from Sault Ste. Marie enthusiastic about the prospect of a Y in North Bay because of the successful campaign that was being held there at the time, and had predicted: "North Bay is going to have a Y sooner or later."⁴⁶ The same enthusiasm that had rubbed off on McDonald was clearly still present when the group from North Bay visited Sault Ste. Marie in 1966 for inspiration for their own campaign.

By October 20th, the YMCA campaign was over and was a huge success, being oversubscribed by about \$18,000. The campaign needed one week more than originally planned, but in the end, it garnered more than twice the amount of any previous area fundraising effort. This fact was not lost on one resident who commented: "North Bay

⁴⁴ "'Y' Campaign Hits \$211,999 Figure," *North Bay Nugget*, October 5th, 1966.

⁴⁵ "N. Bay Religious Leaders Solidly Behind 'Y' Drive," *North Bay Nugget*, August 22nd, 1966.

⁴⁶ "Former N. Bay Resident Sends Donation to Family Y Campaign," *North Bay Nugget*, September 10th, 1966.

has come a long way since 1935, when it was a real struggle to raise \$25,000 to build the arena on King St.”⁴⁷ That struggle, during the depths of the Great Depression, laid the foundation for the Y’s future in North Bay. The success of this campaign was in large part thanks to national firms and special gifts, which accounted for close to \$200,000 of the total.⁴⁸ In addition, the Y’s partnerships with many local businesses and groups contributed to the fund. The *Nugget* donated \$5000⁴⁹, while local chapters of charitable groups like the Lions Club and Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire (IODE) contributed to the Y fund as well. At the meeting declaring the conclusion of the campaign, president Graham also announced plans to break ground early in 1967 on the site next to the pool on Chippewa St.⁵⁰

In March 1967, the Centennial pool first opened to the public. The public response was massive and the pool was heavily attended. Y officials started with an experimental schedule based on those at other YMCAs. The schedule was frequently revised during the first few months of operation, as it was in heavy demand. Different times were scheduled for adults, high school aged youth, younger children and family swims. Instructional periods were incorporated within the first month of operation as well. The official opening ceremony for the pool was appropriately enough held on Dominion Day, July 1st. Lord Thomson was present for the city’s celebrations, including the one for the pool. Thousands of area residents and visitors clogged the Memorial Gardens parking lot and a huge crowd stood around the pool as the ceremony proceeded. Robert Moynan, who had become president of the Y, held the ribbon for the ceremony

⁴⁷ “‘Y’ Drive Success; Record for N. Bay,” *North Bay Nugget*, October 21st, 1966.

⁴⁸ “‘Y’ Fund Passes \$260,000 Mark as Final Phase Opens,” *North Bay Nugget*, October 13th, 1966.

⁴⁹ “Nugget Gives \$5000 to YMCA,” *North Bay Nugget*, October 15th, 1966.

⁵⁰ “‘Y’ Drive Success; Record for N. Bay,” *North Bay Nugget*, October 21st, 1966.

while Thomson cut it. At the ceremony, Thomson donated an additional \$10,000 for the pool facilities, saying that he intended it to be used to allow needy children the chance to use the pool.⁵¹ For his tremendous contributions, Moynan presented Thomson with a lifetime membership at the Y. Half an hour after cutting the ribbon for the pool, Thomson laid the cornerstone for the new Y complex as well.

The construction of the complex had started by April 1967, and ended up costing around \$240,000. This was a bit higher than originally anticipated, as a rock shelf had to be blasted, and the cost of building materials rose during construction.⁵² The remainder from the campaign fund was used to equip the building and provide for three years' operating expenses. The new complex first opened on November 30th, yet only the gym was available at the time, while the squash court and weight training room were still receiving finishing touches. During the course of the winter, the new facility was completed. On March 4th 1968, the official opening of the Y complex took place, and John Farquhar, chairman of the Y building committee, cut the ceremonial ribbon. More than 180 Y supporters observed the ribbon cutting. As had been planned, the new facility had a large gymnasium, which is still the main gym at the Y today. It also housed a squash court, weight training room, a lounge and club rooms.⁵³ The building opening represented the culmination of ten years of hard work by YMCA workers, volunteers and supporters. The North Bay Y finally had a well constructed, permanent building of its own.

⁵¹ "July 1st was a Nostalgic Day for Lord Thomson in N. Bay," *North Bay Nugget*, July 2nd, 1967.

⁵² "Decide to Reopen Tenders for N. Bay YMCA Complex," *North Bay Nugget*, April 19th, 1967.

⁵³ Ralph Erskine, "YMCA Activities," *North Bay Nugget*, January 12th, 1968.

Programs and services leading up to the opening of the new complex were of course piecemeal. Programs at the building on Jet Ave. were delayed because of the space taken up by the campaign office. Gym classes and sports were held at such schools as Algonquin Composite, Tweedsmuir and Sunset Park. St. Andrew's and St. John's Churches also played host to some Y classes.⁵⁴ However, school board decisions and changes of schedule forced the Y to frequently juggle its own schedule or find new locations altogether. Various non-athletic groups and classes met at the Jet Ave. building as well. An adult film discussion group and the Nipissing Field Naturalists Club held weekly meetings at the Y building.⁵⁵

The Centennial pool was in heavy use immediately upon opening in 1967, and within months, a wide range of graduated instructional courses and Red Cross survival swimming courses were integrated into the pool schedule. By August, the pool held daily general swims for boys and girls, instructional classes three times a week for all levels, adult/high school age swim times in the evening, and three mid-week family swims.⁵⁶ During the week, the pool became very popular amongst local workers as an alternative to the traditional lunchtime break. Synchronized swimming classes quickly became popular as well. The Y even started offering scuba and skin diving lessons. The instructional and Red Cross courses helped develop numerous life guards, many of whom then turned around and volunteered at the Y to supervise swim periods and provide instruction themselves. The YMCA was indeed building community leaders and volunteers. The opening of the pool also helped develop local competitive swim teams. In

⁵⁴ Ralph Erskine, "YMCA Activities," *North Bay Nugget*, September 28th, 1966.

⁵⁵ Ralph Erskine, "YMCA Activities," *North Bay Nugget*, March 8th, 1967.

⁵⁶ Ralph Erskine, "YMCA Activities," *North Bay Nugget*, August 3rd, 1967.

January 1968, a team from North Bay placed 3rd at a swim meet in Sudbury.⁵⁷ The pool was very popular and between January 1st, 1967 and the official opening of the new Y building fifteen months later, it had helped attract an impressive 51,714 visits to the Y.⁵⁸ The Centennial pool was clearly proving its tremendous value to the community early on.

Naturally, once the new complex opened, Y services expanded greatly and assumed a more regular and stable schedule. The popularity of the noon hour swimming period for the business community evolved to include basketball on Mondays, Wednesdays and Friday, while volleyball was enjoyed on Tuesdays and Thursdays in the new gym.⁵⁹ In addition to these sports, the gym played host to running and fitness classes, boys' and girls' gym classes, badminton, gymnastics and other sports. The weight training room and squash courts offered additional activities. As with the pool, an initially experimental schedule was modified and revised as the Y aimed to address the demands of its users.

Camp Bay Y continued to be held during the summer months at Four Mile Bay, offering swimming, canoeing, arts and crafts. At the same time, the camp taught survival skills and held fun activities such as the "Little Olympics," in which the camp was divided into two teams and competed in various land and water events.⁶⁰ In addition, the Y continued to provide a babysitting service during women's classes. There was a charge of 25 cents per session, and the child had to be at least two years old.⁶¹ The Y would

⁵⁷ "Plenty of Activity for All," *North Bay Nugget*, January 23rd, 1968.

⁵⁸ Lorne Gannon, "North Bay YMCA Vital Part of International Movement," March 5th, 1968.

⁵⁹ Ralph Erskine, "YMCA Activities," *North Bay Nugget*, January 29th, 1968.

⁶⁰ Ralph Erskine, "YMCA Activities," *North Bay Nugget*, August 3rd, 1967.

⁶¹ Ralph Erskine, "YMCA Activities," *North Bay Nugget*, January 12th, 1968.

continue to expand this service in the future, allowing it to develop into a nursery school and ultimately, a comprehensive childcare centre.

The North Bay YMCA in the 1970s and 1980s

During the 1970s, the Y continued to expand upon its programs and services. An examination of the programs offered in 1972 provides a good example of this. The Centennial pool continued to be tremendously popular and experienced heavy usage. Aquatic classes such as the program for mothers and their pre-school children were fully registered and had waiting lists. For those that were unable to register, the Y suggested that children be brought to family swims and taught by family members with the assistance and advice of the lifeguards on duty.⁶² The popularity of the Y complex was sustained as well. For example, men's volleyball sessions had its best attended season by the end of 1972, with ten or more men attending every session.⁶³

In addition to its regular programs, the Y had a supply of quiet games such as chess, checkers, Chinese checkers and playing cards. Some of these and other non-physical games would lead to the creation of clubs, such as the chess club. These would fluctuate in number and depended on the level of interest. Sometimes, schools or other groups were more popular and the Y would modify what it offered to address where certain needs were not being met in the community. The Y also continued to offer babysitting services and held its annual summer day camp. The Y also expanded the services it offered to local youth when school was not in session by establishing special

⁶² Ralph Erskine, "YMCA Activities," *North Bay Nugget*, March 17th, 1972.

⁶³ Ralph Erskine, "YMCA Activities," *North Bay Nugget*, December 8th, 1972.

schedules during March Break, providing activities and services for the city's youth during its week off from school. Like the summer day camp, March Break activities would continue to be offered every year.

By 1977, the Y was enjoying the services of many volunteers and staff that had been trained at the facilities on Chippewa St. A good example of this kind of "home grown" volunteer was Rod Scott. Like so many others, he had first started as a Y user. He passed all the available swim qualifications, and then became a volunteer and instructor himself. He would go on to become the Y's chief aquatic instructor and lead life-saving skills courses. These courses would train certified life-savers at an impressive rate. The North Bay Y's production rate of life-savers was highest among northern Ontario's YMCAs, fifth among Canadian YM & YWCAs in cities of less than 50,000, and ninth among all Ontario organizations.⁶⁴ Another person who trained at the North Bay Y as a member and leader was Mary Douglas. Douglas was involved with a government program called Ontario Culture and Recreation Experience '77, and was brought on to the Y to help out the staff. Because the regular staff was too busy with their daily tasks to do so, Douglas got to know the children who used the Y on an individual level, allowing them to feel more welcome and comfortable.⁶⁵ Scott and Douglas are just two examples of the numerous volunteers who ensured the Y ran smoothly. In addition, there were swimmers of all ages who helped with instruction, young mothers who helped with toddlers, and volunteer referees. In addition, a continually important group was volunteer canvassers, as the Y has always relied heavily on the donations of its supporters.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Ralph Erskine, "Family YMCA," *North Bay Nugget*, March 17th, 1977.

⁶⁵ Ralph Erskine, "Family YMCA," *North Bay Nugget*, July 20th, 1977.

⁶⁶ Ralph Erskine, "Family YMCA," *North Bay Nugget*, December 10th, 1977.

The early 1980s saw another major construction project for the Y. This construction was planned to build a new addition to the Y facilities. The addition was planned to include a new mini gym with an elevated indoor track, three racquetball/squash courts, a lounge and social area, an office, an elevator for the disabled, and storage areas. In addition, the showers and lockers would be renovated and updated. To fund the project, the Y held a capital fundraising project in 1981 with 200 workers involved that raised \$393,000. That amount was nearly matched by a Wintario grant of \$382,000. In addition, a \$52,500 access grant was provided by the ministry of tourism and recreation for the installation of the elevator for the disabled. The elevator, once installed, made the entire Y facility accessible, aside from the elevated rubberized track in the new mini-gym.⁶⁷ Ground was first broken for the addition in August of 1982. Des-Build Development was given the contract for the addition, as their bid of \$817,766 was the lowest of the five submitted. By the time it was finished, the addition cost \$920,000.⁶⁸

The addition was complete by the spring of 1983, and the official unveiling took place on April 6th. Many officials were present at the ceremony, including Rix Rogers, CEO of the YMCA National Council, and Reuben Baetz, the minister of tourism and recreation. The ribbon for the ceremony was cut by a child, a teenager, and a senior citizen. George Holmes, the Y president, commented: "Here you have an indication of the span of ages of people who use the YMCA."⁶⁹ The addition nearly doubled the size of the facility and allowed for an additional 1000 people to use the Y. Rogers commended staff, volunteers and members for their "effort and effectiveness" and the

⁶⁷ "'Y' Job to Start," *North Bay Nugget*, July 21st, 1982.

⁶⁸ Liz McCulloch, "YMCA Addition Gets Finishing Touches," *North Bay Nugget*, March 24th, 1983.

⁶⁹ "YMCA Praised for Efforts in Securing New Addition," *North Bay Nugget*, April 6th, 1983.

centre's "outstanding development and growth." Baetz congratulated local citizens and stressed the necessity for people "who are prepared to get behind a project."⁷⁰ As in 1963 and 1966, supporters of the Y had worked hard to prove that great things can be accomplished together. "Meeting the challenge" had become synonymous with the growth of the North Bay YMCA.

Another major Y project that culminated in the early 1980s was the day care centre. Beforehand, the Y had offered a nursery school as an extension of the babysitting services that were available in the '60s and early '70s. This was a great development, and was largely thanks to the work of Bob Austin, who was CEO of the Y at the time. Mike Harris, who was Nipissing's MPP and later the premier of Ontario, cut the ribbon at the opening ceremony on July 19th, 1982.⁷¹ Austin announced at the ribbon-cutting ceremony that \$43,000 in provincial grants would be used to renovate and prepare for the program. The centre first opened its doors to the public on September 7th and registration filled up quickly. Sharon Buchan, the day care coordinator, commented: "Traditionally, people in North Bay have relied on neighbours for babysitting. What we're offering children is an opportunity to learn while playing."⁷² The program was designed to match the cognitive development of each individual child, catering to different levels of knowledge and ability. This included a developmental program for children with disabilities. The children in the day care program would additionally have use of the entire Y facility. The centre was at first capable of handling 34 children, with a staff of five teachers and one cook. The rate of the service was \$280 per month, or \$14 per day. At the time, there were

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ "New YMCA Day Care Centre to Ease Shortage of Service," *North Bay Nugget*, July 20th, 1982.

⁷² "Fun, Learning Teamed at Day Care Centres," *North Bay Nugget*, September 11th, 1982.

only two other day care buildings in North Bay, and the Y's rate was the same or less than both facilities. In its first year, the YMCA day care centre was meeting projections and experienced 70% capacity.⁷³ In the ensuing years, the centre would continue to expand and become more widely used.

The YMCA's ability to get involved in these projects was due to careful budgeting and an increase of membership income. In 1982, membership income was up 30% from 1981, while total revenue from program sales was 48% higher than 1981. Sales of daily passes had also increased 30%. Careful management had also helped the Y, as noted by Austin: "Quite a few years ago, we had large deficits and we have budgeted over the last three years for a small surplus."⁷⁴ The improving financial situation had allowed the Y to create the day care centre and also help with the establishment of Yes Employment Services. In its first year in North Bay, Yes counseled 350 unemployed youths, and enjoyed a 60% success rate. It has continued to expand its services to the local unemployed sector as a non-profit corporation under a volunteer board of directors, much like the Y.

Y programs in the 1980s expanded to serve North Bay's surrounding towns. Partnerships with townships and school boards allowed the Y to host programs in schools and community centres. In Callander, Powassan, Nipissing, Restoule, Trout Creek, Port Loring, South River, Sundridge, Burks Falls and Emsdale, Y programs were introduced. The town programs varied, but they usually included gymnastics and fitness classes, and sometimes karate, judo, tai chi, dance and art. In North Bay, programs continued as usual with a wide multitude of options and expanded into the new back addition. In the pool,

⁷³ "YMCA Marks Growth Year," *North Bay Nugget*, March 10th, 1983.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

graduated swimming lessons were still available, as were aquatic leadership and life-saving courses. Additionally, the Y Titan swim team offered the chance to swim competitively. In 1987, the twenty member team was coached by George Holmes.⁷⁵ The Y also frequently hosted special events for youth and teens. The leadership program, which helped develop personal and teaching skills, was offered to interested members as young as twelve. Some programs extended into local schools as well. In addition to its traditional athletic services, the Y provided important courses promoting family and personal skills. Workshops offered assistance with parenting, dealing with divorce, and various common issues and challenges.

The summer camps had evolved as well, including kinder camp for children three to five years old, discovery camp for six to eight year olds, and adventure camp for nine to twelve year olds. Each provided activities, sports and games at the Y facility. In addition, summer camping at Camp Tillicum continued to be available and very popular. A partnership with the Rotary Club for the camp was established in 1986, and the camp was offered throughout the summer each year. It featured swimming, canoeing, nature study, special events and campfires. In 1986, the camp had grown to occupy 88 acres of land on the south shore of Lake Nipissing, with 22 cottages, a large dining facility, craft hall, and a basketball court. Moreover, the Y developed its March Break services to feature a day camp as well, serving six to twelve year olds.⁷⁶

The North Bay YMCA from the 1990s to Present

⁷⁵ "Quality of Y-Titan Swimmers Shows in International Meet," *North Bay Nugget*, July 3rd, 1987.

⁷⁶ "March Mania," *North Bay Nugget*, March 11th, 1987.

The 1990s saw an expansion of both athletic programs and enrichment services, which provided counseling and advice in a multitude of courses. The mini-gym constructed as part of the new addition was used at the time as a training centre, and new equipment was periodically introduced to the facility. The day care centre had grown as well. When it was first established, it had only a few staff members, but by 1993, it featured a staff of 28. This included fully trained teachers, teachers' assistants, volunteers, program supervisors, and full-time cooks. First- and second-year Early Childhood Education students also spent four to six weeks at the centre to fulfill their course placement requirements, giving valuable hands-on experience. By this time the centre, under director Chris MacMillan, served between 120 and 180 children each day, between the ages of 18 months and 12 years. A variety of participation options were available, in order to best suit the specific schedule of each family. The centre had grown to occupy half of the entire Y facility, and had expanded into two new locations – another facility on Chippewa St. and one on Gertrude St. In addition, the centre at the Y facility featured a resource centre for children with physical or developmental needs.⁷⁷

In recent years, weightlifting and strength training have become a popular pursuit for all ages of Y members. A large reason for this development has been the work of Larry Sheppard. Sheppard was a champion weightlifter who had been a member of the national team. He had first come to the North Bay Y in 1972, and worked out with the few squat racks that were available at the time. Within a year, he helped organize a project with the board of directors to update the weightlifting room. With some of the board members' own money and a government grant, the room was renovated and

⁷⁷ "Waiting List for YMCA Childcare," *YMCA 35th Anniversary Newsletter*, September 16th, 1993.

Sheppard was able to teach interested weightlifters in the summer of 1974. Sheppard was then approached by Donny Craig, a local hockey player, who wanted to become stronger. Sheppard worked on a strength and conditioning program with him that soon attracted some other local athletes. This was a novel concept for athletes, as very few even lifted weights, but Sheppard soon gained a reputation within the local community, and his clientele grew. In the 1980s, Bert Templeton was coach of the North Bay Centennials and approached Sheppard about working as his team's strength and conditioning coach. Sheppard accepted the position and became the Ontario Hockey League's first such coach.⁷⁸

In 1996, Sheppard moved back to North Bay from southern Ontario, where he had lived for a few years. Upon his return, he started sports conditioning again, working with the Y Titans swimming team. Around this time, many of the people he coached expressed an interest in Olympic weightlifting, which is far more technical than power lifting. Sheppard responded by creating the Norsemen Weightlifting Club and soon after that, the Valkyries Club for girls. However, the facilities at the Y for weightlifting were somewhat elementary and impeded upon the space needed for other programs. Sheppard thus approached CEO John Lewis and asked about using one of the racquetball courts for weightlifting, as they were often unused. Lewis readily agreed to his plan, and Sheppard and his weightlifters moved into the court in 2001, renaming it the Athletic Performance Centre, and providing it with updated equipment. The new centre was much better suited for weightlifting and allowed Sheppard to use the latest training techniques.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Larry Sheppard, interview by author, June 24th, 2008.

⁷⁹ Gerry Desormeau, "YMCA Opens Door to New Training Centre," *North Bay Nugget*, October 30th, 2001.

Within just a few years, both the Norsemen and the Valkyries would be amongst the top junior teams in Ontario. In 1999, for example, the Ontario Weightlifting Association ranked the Norsemen and Valkyries as the top junior male and female teams in the province.⁸⁰ The success has sustained in recent years, and many local lifters, such as former Canadian junior champion Melissa Ladouceur, have gone on to compete in major international competitions.⁸¹ The North Bay clubs usually fare well at meets, which are often held at the Y. In addition to the weightlifting clubs, Sheppard has continued to work on strength training with athletes, and has worked with NHL players like North Bay's own Craig Rivet and Ray Giroux. Sheppard's teaching methods and strength training knowledge have made him highly sought after by a whole range of athletes. In addition, Sheppard has supplied the same strength training for paramedics and police officers.⁸²

In 1999, the YMCA was instrumental in founding a new drop-in centre for teenagers, the Youth Taking Charge centre. The downtown facility featured a study area, big-screen television, computers, pool tables and more. The centre aimed to keep down juvenile delinquency by providing a safe meeting place for youth, as there was a growing concern that teenagers felt there was nothing to do. Funding from Human Resources Development Canada and the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation ensured that the centre would continue to operate for nine months. The centre came about largely because of the work of Chantale Marion, the drop-in centre's program

⁸⁰ "North Bay Lifters Win Awards," *North Bay Nugget*, May 3rd, 1999.

⁸¹ Ken Pagan, "Ladouceur off to Meet World's Best," *North Bay Nugget*, July 5th, 2005.

⁸² Larry Sheppard, interview by author, June 24th, 2008.

coordinator, and Marilyn Jackson, the Y's director of operations.⁸³ Special events such as musical performances, dances and car washes assisted with its funding after the first nine months. Unfortunately, the centre was forced to close in December because its funding ran out. Fundraising initiatives simply fell short, despite a high level of interest and usage from local youth.⁸⁴

For many years, groups had been pushing for a new pool facility for North Bay. A large reason for this was the need for a therapeutic pool. The Nipissing Association for Disabled Youth (NADY) had pushed for a new pool since the early 1980s. Dooley Ricci, president of NADY, explained the need for a therapeutic pool: "Disabled people need the warmth because they are not as active."⁸⁵ Ricci spearheaded the project because there was no suitable water therapy facility for his daughter, who was suffering from rheumatoid arthritis. NADY soon developed a partnership with the YMCA, the city of North Bay and the Rotary Club to construct a therapeutic pool to serve local people with disabilities.⁸⁶ As NADY pursued this project, it gradually grew to include a new recreational pool to replace the Centennial pool, which became increasingly considered out of date. The project thus grew to become a massive, \$7.5 million endeavor to construct an aquatic centre attached to the YMCA and consisting of four pools – the therapeutic pool, a six lane, 25 metre long main pool, a splash pad for infants, and a teaching pool. Fundraising for the project was slow, as the Y had to compete with many other community projects. For example, campaigns for Jack Pine Hill and the hospital

⁸³ Jennifer Hamilton, "New Drop-in Centre to Replace Main St. as Youth Hangout," *North Bay Nugget*, May 7th, 1999.

⁸⁴ "Venues Vital for Young Bands to Show their Stuff: Concert Held in Home's Basement," *North Bay Nugget*, January 13th, 2001.

⁸⁵ Arnie Hakala, "Getting Back into the Swim: 22-Year Effort Finally ends as Aquatic Centre Opens," *North Bay Nugget*, October 4th, 2002.

⁸⁶ Arnie Hakala, "Dooley's Long Wait Finally Over," *North Bay Nugget*, June 8th, 2001.

CAT scan fund made fundraising for the aquatic centre more difficult.⁸⁷ As a result, the project would not conclude until 22 years after NADY first started pursuing it.

To make the aquatic centre a reality, many groups came together to provide funding. The city raised \$2.2 million that was more than matched by a \$2.4 million from the North Ontario Heritage Fund. The Rotary Club led the way in local fundraising, providing \$700,000 for the project.⁸⁸ Although some aspects of the project had to be cut back or modified, the fundraising was ultimately successful and construction began in 2001. Critchley Delean Trussler Evans Bertrand Architects designed the new facility. Lucien Delean founded the firm along with Norm Critchley, and had been closely involved with the North Bay Y ever since its inception. His firm had helped design the Centennial pool and the new addition in 1982. The aquatic centre finally opened its doors in September 2002. It featured five change rooms catering to families, men, boys, women and girls, as well as a viewing gallery overlooking the pools.⁸⁹ After 22 years of hard work by numerous members of the community like Ricci and campaign chairman Lachlan McLachlan, the aquatic centre was open. In the following years, the old Centennial pool would be renovated to become the new fitness centre, which was relocated from the mini-gym. The mini-gym then became a multi-use studio for aerobic classes, yoga and other activities. A new front entrance to the Y was also constructed as part of the aquatic centre.

Jean McClements was honoured as a special guest at the opening ceremony of the aquatic centre. She had been the first to swim in the Centennial pool when it had first

⁸⁷ John Size, "Blitz on for New Pool," *North Bay Nugget*, September 27th, 1999.

⁸⁸ Jennifer Hamilton, "Big Splash for New Aquatic Centre: Rotary Club Donates \$700,000 toward Therapeutic Pool," *North Bay Nugget*, September 22nd, 2001.

⁸⁹ Gord Young, "Aquatic Centre Open for Swimmers," *North Bay Nugget*, September 16th, 2002.

opened in 1967 as the Y's program coordinator.⁹⁰ In that same year, McClements established the Luncheon Leaders, an organization of volunteers who would hold a free lunch once a month for women and their children. The program was successful upon its inception and expanded in 1978, when the Lady Leader Corp was formed. In addition to the usual monthly luncheon, the lady leaders would meet once a month and plan preschool classes and gym and swim classes. They also planted trees in Thomson Park and held community events. Over time, a small fee was charged for the luncheons and occasional fund-raising bake sales were organized. The proceeds would go directly towards YMCA needs, such as resuscitation devices, the aquatic centre, and helping underprivileged children attend camps.⁹¹ The Luncheon Leaders disbanded in 2005 after serving the community for 38 years, because its volunteer base was decreasing. McClements' leadership in the 1970s was very important to many women in the community. Her enthusiasm drew women into the Y, who participated in her energetic fitness classes. Like so many others, her inspired leadership rubbed off on numerous members, some of whom, like Linda Wilkinson, Jean Robinson, Maureen Bruce-Payne and Carol Hicks, became Y volunteers, staff and Lady Leaders themselves.

The North Bay YMCA has continued to provide important services and involve itself in local charitable events. The day care centre has expanded to become the biggest day care provider in the region. It continues to provide space at the Y facility, and various other buildings in the area, as well as offering home child care in suitable circumstances. The Y has also continued to offer a variety of March Break and summer camp programs.

⁹⁰ Arnie Hakala, "Getting Back into the Swim: 22-Year Effort finally ends as Aquatic Centre Opens," *North Bay Nugget*, October 4th, 2002.

⁹¹ Jennifer Hamilton-McCharles, "Luncheon Leaders Officially Retire," *North Bay Nugget*, February 14th, 2005.

In 1993, the YMCA teamed with Tim Horton charities to organize a charitable golf tournament. This tournament has become an annual event, raising thousands of dollars each year for Tim Horton charities.⁹² The Y has also involved itself with programs that help ensure today's youth have plenty of opportunities to create positive futures, such as Ontario's Promise. As CEO Kim Kanmacher explains, "We do have lots of activities they can get themselves involved with including healthy lifestyles, licensed child-care programs, and we do provide care right up from infancy until young adulthood. We've also been able to take some of those skills and mentor them and teach them, and they become our leaders."⁹³ These are just a few examples of the countless community initiatives the Y involves itself with.

The Y has also helped disadvantaged children and adults use its facilities. Its annual "Strong Kids, Strong Families, Strong Community" campaign helps raise money for the Y and allows it to sponsor such individuals. In 2003 alone, the Y financially sponsored memberships, camperships and child care, representing approximately \$230,000.⁹⁴ In 2004, that figure rose to \$350,000.⁹⁵ In other terms, 17% of its membership base in 2004 was sponsored in some form. Kanmacher outlined the Y's policy: "If it's a matter of someone not being able to afford a membership rather than them being unwilling to afford it," then the YMCA will provide financial sponsorship. In turn, the assisted members are expected to contribute to the Y in any way they can.⁹⁶

⁹² "Purificati Captures Charity Golf Classic," *North Bay Nugget*, August 21st, 1999.

⁹³ Phil Novak, "City YMCA Awarded Little Red Wagon," *North Bay Nugget*, July 24th, 2002.

⁹⁴ Heidi Van Lith, "YMCA of North Bay Building Strong Kids, Families, Communities", *North Bay Nugget*, July 31st, 2004.

⁹⁵ "YMCA Sets \$40,000 Goal," *North Bay Nugget*, May 3rd, 2005.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

One of the most obvious qualities of the North Bay YMCA is its accepting and welcoming nature. It consistently makes strides to make its facilities accessible to the entire community. For example, in 2005, a \$75,000 Ontario Trillium Foundation grant was used to add specially modified fitness equipment which is easier to use for young people and those with disabilities.⁹⁷ Just months later, a provincial Communities In Action Fund grant of \$22,500 was used to help create a program assisting youth and adults with mobility limitations in recreational activities.⁹⁸ In interviews with past staff and volunteers, the Y's welcoming acceptance of all members of society is consistently apparent. As Marilyn Jackson explains, "The biggest benefit is the feeling of family that you get from being part of the Y."⁹⁹ The facility's staff is so welcoming in fact, that in 2004, the North Bay Y was ranked as the best in the country for being "friendly, warm and welcoming."¹⁰⁰ The External Y Evaluation made 880 visits and 880 phone calls to 88 YMCAs across Canada to determine which staff was most accommodating to prospective members. The findings supported the reputation of friendliness and welcoming that the North Bay branch had built for years.

The YMCA's success in North Bay is a direct product of the quality of its staff and volunteers. Because they believe in the Y's purpose, their enthusiasm informs their work and inspires others. Many Y members also become volunteers or staff. In the early years, the Y survived because of the hard work and dedication of its board and supporters, whose efforts have enabled the Y to survive fire, near financial ruin and a

⁹⁷ "'Y' to Buy Special Equipment," *North Bay Nugget*, October 6th, 2005.

⁹⁸ *North Bay Nugget*, January 26th, 2006.

⁹⁹ Marilyn Jackson, interview by author, June 10th, 2008.

¹⁰⁰ "City's YMCA Ranked First in Canada," *North Bay Nugget*, January 20th, 2004.

multitude of moves. Partnerships with the city, other community groups, and school boards in major fundraising initiatives in 1963, 1966, the early 1980s, and leading up to 2002 reflect the continuing importance of the Y in the Nipissing region. Through it all, the Y has provided extensive activities and community services. The North Bay YMCA was truly built by the same people it serves and is a tribute to the community's commitment to each other.

Bibliography

Canadian Census, 1961.

Crocker, Ruth. Review of *Men and Women Adrift: The YMCA and the YWCA in the City*, by Nina Mjagkij and Margaret Spratt, eds. *Journal of American History* 85, no. 2 (1998): 697-698.

North Bay Nugget, January 1958-May 2006.

Putney, Clifford W. "Going Upscale: The YMCA and Postwar America, 1950-1990." *Journal of Sport History* 20, no. 2 (1993): 151-166.

YMCA Documents, Programs, Newsletters. 1986-2008.

Acknowledgements

I'd like to thank Dr. Noel for her encouragement and support of this project, and the very interesting people who consented to talk with me about their experiences. Their first-hand knowledge of the North Bay Y contributed immensely to this report, as well as to my own understanding of its importance to the community: Dick Tafel, Larry Sheppard, Lucien Delean, John Lewis, Marilyn Jackson, Linda Wilkinson, Jean Robinson, Carol Hicks, Maureen Bruce-Payne, Dan Gagnon, Mike Brophy and Chris MacMillan. I'd also like to thank the staff at the Y, most notably Kim Kanmacher and Yvonne Taylor, for their assistance over the course of my research. Finally, I'd like to thank the staff of the North Bay public library for their help throughout my time researching microfilm.